UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION

Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
33rd meeting
held on
Thursday, 9 December 1993
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 33rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. OSELLA (Argentina)
(Vice-Chairman)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 123: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1994-1995 (continued)

First reading (continued)

Part I. Overall policy-making, direction and coordination (continued)

Part II. Political affairs (continued)

Part III. International justice and law (continued)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of the publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/48/SR.33
16 February 1994

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

93-82939 (E)

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Osella (Argentina), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 123: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1994-1995 (continued) (A/48/6, A/48/7, A/48/16 (Part I) and (Part II) and A/48/32/Rev.1/Add.1; A/C.5/48/9 and Corr.1 and Add.1 and A/C.5/48/26)

First reading (continued)

Part I. Overall policy-making, direction and coordination (continued)

Part II. Political affairs (continued)

Part III. International justice and law (continued)

1. Ms. SAEKI (Japan), referring to section 1 of the proposed programme budget, said that the proposed downgrading of the post of Executive Secretary of the Board of Auditors from D-1 to P-5 was a matter of some concern to her delegation and should be reviewed. Her delegation was also concerned by the possible duplication of work between the Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations and other departments, such as the Department of Public Information (DPI). In addition, she would welcome clarification of the Secretary-General's proposal concerning the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva.

2. Turning to section 3 (Political affairs), she took note of the recent report of the Secretary-General on high-level posts (A/C.5/48/9), in which the Secretary-General proposed to consolidate all political action under a single under-secretary-general. She hoped that the implementation of that proposal would strengthen the Department of Political Affairs. Her delegation supported the proposed allocation of resources for such areas as preventive diplomacy and electoral assistance. On the other hand, in view of the rapid changes in the international political situation in recent years, a review should be undertaken of resources allocated to obsolete or low-priority activities. Her delegation supported many of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) in that regard.

3. On the question of arms control and disarmament, her delegation believed that the Organization's activities in that field were of vital importance and that adequate resources must accordingly be allocated.

4. She wished to request additional information on the proposed transfer of secretariat services to the General Assembly and Security Council from the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to the Division of Administration and Management (DAM). She would also welcome an explanation of the merits of transferring the Field Operations Division (FOD) to the Department of Peace-keeping Operations (DPKO). She agreed that DPKO needed to be strengthened but

(Ms. Saeki, Japan)

stressed that that should be done in a rational manner. Her delegation also believed that clear standards should be set for the division of responsibility between the support account for peace-keeping operations and the regular budget.

5. Finally, with reference to legal activities, her delegation considered that the expenses of the International War Crimes Tribunal should be met from the regular budget.

6. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco), commenting on the report of the Advisory Committee (A/48/7), requested clarification as to how the Advisory Committee had arrived at the figure of 187 per cent representing the increase in appropriations for the Trusteeship Council.

7. His delegation supported the proposed resource allocation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People pending the conclusion of the current peace process.

8. In paragraph II.10, the Advisory Committee recommended the deletion of one General Service post from the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs on the grounds that the justification for the post was inadequate. His delegation was of the view that, since the justification for the deletion of the post was also inadequate, the proposal should be approved in order to ensure the proper functioning of the Office.

9. The question of preventive diplomacy (para. II.11) had recently assumed vital importance, particularly since the presentation by the Secretary-General of An Agenda for Peace. Accordingly, the Security Council had sought to strengthen the role of preventive diplomacy, which had a direct impact on reducing the cost of peace-keeping operations. His delegation therefore supported the allocation of resources and the creation of the posts requested by the Secretary-General.

10. On the question of the redeployment of posts, his delegation would await the results of the study being undertaken by ACABQ before giving its views.

11. Mr. CHUINKAM (Cameroon) regretted that much vital information had not been made available to members of the Committee on the complex item with which it was currently dealing. He hoped that delegations would receive all relevant documents before the start of informal consultations.

12. The CHAIRMAN said that the Secretariat would make available to the Committee all available documentation in order to facilitate its work during the informal consultations.

13. Mr. TAKASU (Controller), replying to questions put earlier by members of the Committee, said that recosting was done in three stages. The budget proposals for the biennium 1994-1995, for example, were based on the inflation and currency exchange rates prevailing at the end of 1992. The first stage of

(Mr. Takasu)

recosting must therefore be undertaken during the current session before the programme budget proposals were adopted. The second recosting exercise would take place at the end of 1994 based on the first performance report and using the most recent available indicators. The third stage would take place at the end of 1995, based on the second performance report. If recosting to adjust for movements in currency and inflation rates were to be retroactive, as suggested by some delegations, a number of practical problems would arise. In the context of the 1982-1983 biennium, for example, recosting of the budget at the first performance report had permitted the reimbursement of $73 million to Member States. Under the procedure whereby recosting would only be done at the end of the biennium, those funds would not have been credited to Member States for another year. If, on the other hand, the level of the dollar substantially decreased during a given biennium, and if recosting were to be retroactive at the end of the biennium, the Secretary-General would find himself in a position in which he would be obliged to incur expenditures well in excess of appropriations. For those reasons, together with the explanations which he had given the previous day, he considered that the current system of three recostings during each biennium was a reasonable one.

14. On the question of vacancy rates, he pointed out that where a staff member under the regular budget was sent on mission and his or her post remained vacant, that post was considered as vacant. If, however, a short-term replacement staff was recruited, then the post was no longer considered vacant, since there was a staff member against it, paid from resources appropriated for that post. He had noted the suggestion that the vacancy rate should be used retroactively to determine expenditures for the following biennium. He recalled that a number of temporary measures, including a freeze on recruitment, had been adopted during the 1992-1993 financial crisis. The current vacancy rate was therefore much higher than historical levels. Moreover, significant fluctuations had been recorded during the current biennium. Use of the most recent vacancy rate would thus create problems, since, following the adoption by the General Assembly of the budget proposals for the biennium 1994-1995, the Secretary-General intended to lift the freeze on recruitment.

15. With regard to the transfer of posts between budget sections, the Secretariat had noted the recommendations of ACABQ concerning the importance of compliance with the financial regulations of the Organization. He wished to point out, however, that the Secretary-General's revised estimates for 1992-1993 had been finally approved by the General Assembly in May 1993, following which the Secretariat had been fully preoccupied with putting together the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995. Among other things, those proposals contained his requests for formalizing adjustments to staffing resources allocated between different sections of the budget, which had initially been made on a temporary basis during the current biennium. It would have been neither practical nor desirable to submit interim, piecemeal requests for redeployment of staffing and other resources between budget sections during the period between May and October 1993 when the budget proposals were being finalized. The interests of budgetary transparency would not have been served,

(Mr. Takasu)

since the structure of the budget in terms of the identification of the relevant resources under the various parts and sections was also in transition. He wished to assure the Committee, however, that in the proposed redeployment of resources a review had been undertaken of the importance and validity of each post. Furthermore, following approval of the proposed programme budget, the Secretariat would strictly observe the relevant financial regulations concerning the need to obtain the authority of ACABQ when transferring resources between sections of the budget during a given biennium.

16. On the question of the provisions for the Board of Auditors, he explained that those provisions reflected the resource requirements submitted to the Controller by the Board. The post of Executive Secretary of the Board of Auditors had been classified at the D-1 level in 1985. Following the retirement of the incumbent, a review of the functions attached to the post had been carried out and it had been reclassified at the P-5 level. A capable person had recently been appointed to the post at the P-5 level and he wished to assure members of the Board that an effective level of services would be maintained.

17. With regard to the Department of Political Affairs, the Secretary-General had proposed that the Department should be headed by a single under-secretary-general supported by two assistant secretaries-general. That structure would enable the under-secretary-general to exercise policy oversight, with responsibilities divided between the two assistant secretaries-general on a broad geographical basis. The prime responsibility of one of the assistant secretaries-general would be for African issues; the precise division of the other functions to be carried out by the Department was still being determined.

18. With regard to the mandate of the Electoral Assistance Unit, he recalled that General Assembly resolution 46/137 set out the mandate of the Electoral Assistance Unit and required that the competent organ of the United Nations should be notified of requests for electoral verification. As defined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/47/668/Add.1), electoral verification was a large-scale operation in which the United Nations was involved in all stages of the electoral process, including registration, campaigning and polling, with a sufficient number of observers to allow for a comprehensive presence throughout the country. Operations other than verification, ranging from requests from a Member State for technical assistance and sending a political officer to follow and report on an electoral process, to the provision of coordination and support to international observers invited by a Member State conducting elections, were considered to fall within the general mandate of General Assembly resolution 46/137. A list of the requests of Member States for electoral assistance and action taken by the Secretariat would shortly be made available to the Committee.

19. On the question of arrangements concerning rental charges for United Nations missions in the field, he pointed out that such charges were usually borne by the Organization.

(Mr. Takasu)

20. As for the workload of the International Court of Justice, he noted that there had been an increase in the number of cases brought before the Court since the biennium 1988-1989.

21. Responding to questions put by members of the Committee concerning the United Nations regional centres for peace and disarmament in general, and the one in Katmandu in particular, he said that estimates of requirements, the functional breakdown of staff and statements of the financial position of each Centre had been submitted to the Fifth Committee on 24 November 1992. In addition, since the establishment of the Regional Centres, the Secretary-General had submitted to the General Assembly each year a comprehensive report on the activities of the Centres which had been carried out during the previous year and had outlined the proposed programme for the following year. A new consolidated report was being prepared and would be made available to ACABQ. On the question of the physical location of the Director of the Regional Centre at Katmandu, he reported that, on a temporary basis, the Director was conducting his work from Headquarters due in part to the general shortage of premises at the disposal of the United Nations system in Katmandu. The Centre had received a grant of US$ 500,000 to construct office space, and the Secretariat was seeking to clarify a number of technical, legal and administrative matters before pursuing concrete plans. Another reason for the Director's temporary location at Headquarters was the fact that insufficient resources had been raised from donor States for local administrative costs, in stark contrast to the contributions received for the substantive activities of the Centre. As soon as the post of the Director was regularized and the financing of the basic local staff assured, the need for that temporary situation would cease to exist.

22. Responding to the question concerning the mandate of the regional centres to deal with issues of preventive diplomacy, he assured the Committee that there was no overlap or duplication of activities between the Office for Disarmament Affairs and other units within the Department of Political Affairs. The regional centres and the United Nations programme of fellowships on disarmament were concerned exclusively with disarmament, arms limitation and confidence-building measures, which would enhance the security of Member States by preventing tensions and conflicts among them. The term "preventive diplomacy" was therefore used in a very narrow sense and expressed a general notion that conflict could be prevented through the conclusion of disarmament agreements which reflected the security requirements of States. He was confident that references to preventive diplomacy in the context of the disarmament programmes could be adjusted in such a way as to avoid any further misunderstandings.

23. Mr. JADMANI (Pakistan), referring to chapter II, paragraph II.52 of the report of the Advisory Committee (A/48/7), noted the Controller's comment that the headquarters accommodation of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) was not the only case in which the United Nations paid the rental for such accommodation. He wondered why UNMOGIP was the only peace-keeping operations singled out in the report of ACABQ and hoped that the Secretary-General would include information on other peace-keeping operations in the performance report for 1992-1993.

24. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that her delegation maintained its reservations with regard to the transfer of resources and continued to believe that decisions were being taken by the Secretariat without the authorization of the General Assembly; the request for increased staffing of the Electoral Assistance Unit represented an instance of such action, since, in fact, General Assembly resolution 46/137, which had been cited by the Controller as the legislative authority for the proposal, specifically stated that the staff of the proposed unit should be small. Her delegation therefore could not agree that new resources should be allocated for the Section; on the contrary, consideration should be given to reducing it. Similarly, in the case of the proposal regarding preventive diplomacy, the authorizing resolution, General Assembly resolution 47/120, stated that such activity should be undertaken on the basis of the consent of the competent bodies, but she could find no reference to any request by the Secretariat for such consent. Her delegation also wondered why no reference had been made in the budget, except in the section concerning travel costs, to so important a matter as the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, which was, in her delegation's view, an action proposal and not a mere declaration of principle.

25. Mr. RAMOS (Spain) said that the explanation provided by the Controller with regard to the vacancy rate was inconsistent with what the Secretary-General had stated in the Fifth Committee concerning the number of United Nations staff members assigned to peace-keeping operations. He therefore agreed with the Chairman of the Advisory Committee regarding the lack of information supplied by the Secretariat and the disadvantage at which it left Member States. An effort must be made to bring the cost estimates provided by the Secretariat into greater conformity with reality.

26. Mr. ORR (Canada) said that there seemed to be a discrepancy between the figures for inflation used by the Secretariat and those published officially. He also shared the views expressed by the representative of Spain with regard to the figures given for the number of staff involved in peace-keeping operations, and felt that some further explanation of that question was required. With regard to the question of recosting, his delegation considered that the inflation factor must also be taken into account; the fluctuation of currency valuations was only one side of the equation.

27. Mr. DAMICO (Brazil) said that the ongoing restructuring process had not only delayed the submission to the Committee of the relevant information but had considerably hindered the assessment of the programme budget proposal and the implementation of General Assembly resolution 47/212. His delegation therefore welcomed the announcement by the Secretary-General that the time for consolidation was approaching.

28. His delegation's position of principle with regard to the proposed programme budget had been clearly expressed in the statement made during the general debate by the representative of Colombia, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77. His delegation had therefore been heartened by the Advisory Committee's endorsement of the Group's views concerning some of the basic

(Mr. Damico, Brazil)

assumptions underlying the proposed programme budget, and particularly its view that the budget must be the translation into financial terms of intergovernmental mandates and should not be transformed into a policy instrument. The so-called "technical parameters" of the budget, which had an across-the-board impact, such as recosting, vacancy rates, non-recurrent expenditures and the delayed impact of new posts, which had been mentioned in the Colombian representative's statement, had also been stressed in the report of the ACABQ.

29. Commenting on Parts I through III, he expressed the hope that the Board of Auditors would make recommendations and requests, through the Advisory Committee, if the resources allocated to it were not commensurate with the increased tasks it had been assigned. It was also his delegation's view, in keeping with the Advisory Committee's recommendations, that the issue of the integrated offices should be dealt with in the context of the relevant programme budget implications document arising from the draft resolution currently being discussed in the Second Committee. With respect to Part II, it supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the Secretariat should submit revised proposals concerning the subsidiary organs served by the Department of Political Affairs if new intergovernmental mandates arising from new developments in the field so required.

30. His delegation welcomed the endorsement by the ACABQ of the request for additional posts in the Office for Security Council and General Assembly Affairs, which was justified in view of the increased resort by the Security Council to the imposition of sanctions and the ad hoc committees set up to administer them. With respect to Part III, his delegation expected that the Secretariat would present proposals in the context of the revised estimates addressing the impact of the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

31. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) said that his delegation remained unconvinced that the vacancy rates estimated by the Secretariat took into account the actual situation; it continued to believe that the vacancy rates given were too high and that any revisions proposed in the performance reports would not necessarily capture all of the savings which should be repaid to Member States. Nor did it accept the idea that the vacancy rates must be kept low in order to deal with the Organization's financial situation; if there was insufficient funding, that should be dealt with by eliminating programmes and continuing the hiring freeze.

32. In general, his delegation was more than ever convinced that the budgetary process was in a shambles and remained seriously concerned about the accuracy of the budget figures and the usefulness of the process being followed, which had the effect of depriving Member States of any meaningful oversight function with regard to the budget. Too much of the information supplied to the Committee was difficult to understand and some of it was meaningless, while the information it did in fact require was not available. For those reasons, his delegation was not optimistic about what the Committee would be able to achieve before the end of the year.

33. Mr. TAKASU (Controller), replying to the comments of delegations, said that the Secretariat would need time to compile the statistical data that had been requested.

34. In response to the questions about the Electoral Assistance Unit, he said that the Unit had been set up after the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 46/137 on enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections. Respect for the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States in their electoral processes, as reaffirmed in General Assembly resolution 46/130, remained a basic principle. More professional posts were needed in order to support the Unit, which would act as a focal point in handling the increasing number of requests by Member States. The Secretary-General had accordingly requested an increase of one Professional post. He felt that the increase was justified given the number of requests for assistance and that it did not constitute a departure from the resolutions of the General Assembly.

35. The Secretariat would submit data at a later stage regarding the so-called discrepancies and inconsistencies in the treatment of vacancies. He did not think that the presentation was inconsistent.

36. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that her delegation would return to the question of the Electoral Assistance Unit in the informal discussions. She welcomed the assurance that the Secretariat took the provisions of resolution 46/130 fully into account. She urged that the conference paper on legislative mandates requested by the representative of the United Kingdom, should be made available to the Committee.

37. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to the conclusions and recommendations regarding Parts I, II and III contained in the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (A/48/16, Part II), and asked whether the Committee was ready to endorse them.

38. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that her delegation would be unable to do so until it had received the information on legislative mandates.

The meeting was suspended at 5 p.m. and resumed at 5.45 p.m.

Part IV. International cooperation for development and Part V. Regional cooperation for development

39. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to begin its consideration of Parts IV and V of the proposed programme budget, noting that the total estimates proposed by the Secretary-General amounted to US$ 314,045,200 for Part IV and US$ 373,423,900 for Part V while the Advisory Committee had recommended appropriations totalling US$ 292,178,000 for Part IV and US$ 343,752,400 for Part V.

40. Mr. TAKASU (Controller) said that Parts IV and V dealt with the various economic and social sections of the Secretariat, in New York, Geneva and the regional commissions. The main element in the restructuring of the economic and social sectors at Headquarters had been their consolidation into three new Departments. The utmost effort had been made to intensify coordination among them. In the final design of the budget for the three, the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis and the Department for Development Support and Management Services, an effort had been made to focus resources as much as possible on essential activities.

41. In section 8, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Secretary-General had requested a number of posts to deal with activities during the biennium in connection with the proposed convention to combat desertification, based on the mandate given in General Assembly resolution 47/188. The Advisory Committee had recommended that provision should be made for 1994 only, and that the 1995 portion should be deducted. A draft resolution on desertification was currently under consideration in the Second Committee. If the General Assembly decided to abolish the 1995 portion of staff costs, as recommended by the Advisory Committee, the Secretary-General would need to submit proposals to cover that cost later, in the context of the budgetary implications of the resolution.

42. Also in section 8, the Secretary-General had requested an amount of $500,000 for the United Nations contribution to the financing of the activities of Non-Governmental Liaison Services. The provision had resulted from the decision by the Administrative Committee on Coordination in 1992 that those activities should be financed through cost-sharing arrangements by the participating organizations in 1994-1995 (para. IV.15). The sum approved by the Joint United Nations Information Committee, under the umbrella of ACC, as the 1994-1995 budget for non-governmental Liaison Services was $1,950,000. Of that, the United Nations portion was $500,000. The sister organizations involved, including UNDP and UNICEF had already made or were about to make budgetary provision to that end, and the Secretary-General hoped that authorization would be given for the grant so that the United Nations could participate in those activities together with the other agencies of the system.

43. Also in section 8, the Secretary-General requested an amount of $110,900, including resource growth of $55,600, as the United Nations share of the costs of the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC). The activities in question had been carried out by the United Nations together with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), according to a cost-sharing formula previously approved by the Advisory Committee and the General Assembly, most recently in 1984. The United Nations share was the same as that of ILO and FAO. In 1990, they had increased their contribution, and the Secretary-General would like to do the same. The recommendation by the Advisory Committee that the proposed resource growth of $58,900 should be deleted would make the United Nations position vis-à-vis the other agencies difficult. The General Assembly

(Mr. Takasu)

attached considerable importance to the role of cooperatives, as indicated in its resolution 47/90 on the role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends, which invited COPAC to maintain and increase its programme of support to the international cooperative movement.

44. There were two points to which he wished to draw attention in section 9, Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis. The Secretary-General had requested six additional Professional posts for activities on micro-economic issues. The Advisory Committee recommended the deletion of all six posts. The request for new posts was related to activities mandated by General Assembly resolutions 46/199, 47/171 and 47/187. The legislative mandate was thus well-documented. Because of the urgent nature of the activities, six posts had already been temporarily allocated to the Department. The Secretary-General was requesting that that provision should be regularized for the next biennium in view of the continuing nature of the activity. The posts should be allocated to the Department pending the evaluation of the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of its activities, in order to ensure continuation of programme delivery.

45. The further point related to activities in connection with the International Conference on Population and Development, to be held in September 1994. The arrangements requested by the Secretary-General would enable the Secretariat to make careful preparations for the Conference. The Advisory Committee had reduced the number of work-months requested by half. That would mean that the preparations for that important Conference would not be fully funded. The Conference was to take place in September and the six work-months proposed by the Advisory Committee would end in June. Moreover, further work would be necessary after the Conference to prepare the report to the General Assembly. The Secretary-General therefore considered that 12 work-months of assistance were necessary.

46. Regarding section 10, Department for Development Support and Management Services, the Advisory Committee recommended keeping the appropriation at the same level with no adjustment, pending the review of the impact of the imminent transfer of the Office for Project Services to the Department. The Secretary-General felt strongly that his estimate for the Department should be approved.

47. In connection with section 11 A, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), he drew attention to the reduction recommended by the Advisory Committee in respect of transnational corporations. Unfortunately, because of the restructuring and the transfer of activities in connection with transnational corporations from the former Centre for Transnational Corporations to UNCTAD, for the purposes of the presentation of the budget table 11 A.50 did not indicate the full scale of the resources available to the Centre for Transnational Corporations in the 1992-1993 budget. Under that budget, $740,000 had been available for consultants and $140,000 for expert groups. The Secretary-General had requested the amount of $827,500 including an increase of $500,000. The Advisory Committee had recommended a reduction of $269,000, which would mean that the programmes relating to transnational corporations would receive less than in the previous biennium.

48. Mr. STOCKL (Rapporteur, the Committee for Programme and Coordination) drew the Committee's attention to paragraphs 84 to 174 of the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (A/48/16 (Part II)), and also to paragraph 33, in which the Committee expressed its concern about possible overlapping and duplication among the three new Departments and between them and other organizations of the United Nations system, noting that the Advisory Committee had expressed a similar concern.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.